

NEWSIN brief

Malaysia's Anwar confident despite sodomy verdict delay

Malaysian opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim said yesterday he was confident the country's top court would overturn a sodomy conviction that could see him jailed, as judges delayed giving a verdict. The Federal Court's five-judge panel, hearing Anwar's appeal, was originally expected to issue a ruling last week, but after extending proceedings to eight days, they said they needed more time to consider the submissions.

Palestinian PM cancels Gaza visit after bombings

Palestinian Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah has cancelled a visit to Gaza planned for today after a wave of bombings hit Fatah property in the territory, government spokesman Ihab Bseiso told AFP. Hamdallah had been due to meet in Gaza with the European Union's new foreign affairs chief Federica Mogherini. But early yesterday, at least 10 explosions hit houses and cars belonging to members of the Fatah movement of Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas in Gaza, an AFP correspondent and witnesses said.

UN accuses Sri Lanka of sabotaging war crimes probe

The UN rights chief accused Sri Lanka yesterday of sabotaging a UN-mandated war crimes probe into the country's brutal separatist war by creating a climate of fear and repression. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein accused Colombo of subjecting civil society groups and rights activists to surveillance, harassment and other forms of intimidation. "A wall of fear has been created that has undoubtedly served to deter people from submitting evidence," he said in a statement.

Singapore PM wins defamation suit against activist

Singapore's High Court ruled yesterday that an activist defamed Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong by accusing him in a blog of misappropriating state pension funds. In the first such ruling in the city-state over a purely online article, a judge issued a summary judgment against Roy Ngerng, a 33-year-old former government employee. Ngerng, who writes a blog called Heart Truths, was seeking trial to defend himself but High Court Judge Lee Seiu Kin ruled that there was "no triable defence against the plaintiff's claim".

Clashes in southern Syria kill 40

At least 40 people have been killed in clashes between Syrian regime forces and opposition fighters including Al-Qaeda's local affiliate in the south of the country, a monitor said yesterday. The forces were killed Thursday, during fighting in Beit Tima, a majority-Druze region in southeastern Damascus province, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. There has been fighting between regime and rebel forces in the region for more than a year, but Thursday's toll is the highest in a single day since violence began there.



Filipino protesters with posters rally near Malacanang presidential palace in Manila yesterday. The protest denounces Philippine President Aquino of alleged neglect for the need of victims of super typhoon Haiyan, who are until now suffering.

EBOLA OUTBREAK

'Thousands' of deaths likely unreported

The raging Ebola outbreak has likely killed far more people than the 4,818 deaths reported by the World Health Organization, an expert at the UN health agency said Thursday, warning that thousands of fatalities were likely not accounted for. "There are lots of missing deaths in this epidemic," Christopher Dye, WHO's strategy chief, told AFP, estimating that around 5,000 fatalities could be missing from the count. This assessment, he said, was based on the knowledge that the fatality rate in the epidemic centred in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone stands at about 70 percent. But with total reported cases of infections reaching 13,042 that suggests that many of the deaths were going unrecorded. Dye said the likely explanation was that many people were burying the dead in secret, possibly to avoid having authorities interfere with burial customs like washing and touching the deceased widely blamed for much of the transmission. The UN's health agency has created confusion with its latest figures of Ebola cases and deaths, which have shown shrinking numbers. The toll provided Wednesday night showed 4,818 deaths, down from 4,951 reported on October 31, while the number of reported cases fell to 13,042 from 13,567. This does not mean that the epidemic is over or that people have stopped dying from the deadly virus, Dye said, explaining instead that the drop in numbers was linked to a shift in the way WHO uses different databases to calculate the overall numbers. "Many, many people are still dying of Ebola," he said. Up until recently, WHO had used several different databases from each of the affected countries to calculate the overall number of cases and deaths.

India's NIA on the cheap hampers war on militants

When a bomb went off last month in West Bengal state, police at India's leading counterterrorism organisation had to hail taxis to get to the scene because they did not have enough cars. The admission by two officers from the National Investigation Agency (NIA) underlines how poorly equipped it is to fulfil its role of investigating the most serious terrorism cases, cutting off funding to militants and putting suspects on trial. The NIA's woes are symptomatic of an overstretched intelligence network at a time when Prime Minister Narendra Modi must counter the growing threat of Islamist militants from Al-Qaeda, and possibly also Islamic State, gaining a foothold in the world's largest democracy. The NIA has no officers specialising



in cyber surveillance, explosives or tracing chemicals and has been forced to ask companies to decrypt computers recovered at crime scenes, officers said. "The government has its budget constraints; we have done quite well in cracking cases with the resources at our disposal," NIA head Sharad Kumar told Reuters in an interview. When NIA officers eventually arrived at the scene of the blast in West

Bengal, bordering Bangladesh to India's east, what they discovered was important. Two members of a banned Bangladeshi militant group had blown themselves up building bombs, and the NIA believes they were part of a series of plots to destabilise Bangladesh. The NIA, which had only opened its West Bengal branch five days earlier, was caught by surprise by the blast, as were other Indian intelligence agencies. It is now investigating the case and says it is struggling to find a dozen senior militant leaders who it said had fled the area after the explosion. So far Modi's government has not responded to the NIA's request made months ago to double the staff, recruit more specialists and create a national centre of excellence to train officers.

Obama sent 'secret letter' to Iran

US President Barack Obama is said to have written a secret letter to Iran's supreme leader describing a shared interest in fighting Islamic State (ISIS). The letter, reported by the Wall Street Journal, also urges Ayatollah Ali Khamenei toward a nuclear agreement, reports BBC. The US president stresses any co-operation on fighting ISIS is contingent on Iran reaching such an agreement by a 24 November diplomatic deadline. The White House has declined to comment on Obama's "private correspondence". But Republican senators John McCain and Lindsey Graham said it was "outrageous" that the president would approach Iran, given its support for the Syrian government and Shia groups such as Lebanon's Hezbollah. "The administration needs to understand that this Iranian regime cares more

about trying to weaken America and push us out of the Middle East than cooperating with us," they said in a joint statement. "The consequences of this ill-conceived bargain would destroy the Syrians' last, best chance to live in freedom from the brutal Assad regime." Meanwhile, Interpol has said would-be jihadists have been travelling on cruise ships to reach conflict areas in the Middle East. The international police body said some of those trying to join militant groups in Iraq and Syria had used cruise lines to get to countries including Turkey. The US has ruled out inviting Iran to join an international coalition it has assembled against ISIS, but has said Iran has a role to play in the fight against ISIS. Islamic State, a Sunni jihadist group, poses a threat to Shia-majority Iran and has taken over large parts of Iran's Shia-dominated ally Iraq.

WAR ON ISIS

HK POLITICAL REFORM

Protest leaders request meeting with Beijing

Hong Kong protest leaders made a formal request yesterday to speak with China over political reform, calling on a pro-Beijing politician to act as their mediator. Protest numbers have dwindled since mass rallies mobilised tens of thousands demanding fully free elections for the city's next leader. But demonstrators are still entrenched at key intersections with a "tent city" spread across the main Admiralty site. Fruitless talks with the Hong Kong government two weeks ago have led to an impasse and protest leaders now want to bypass the unpopular local administration altogether. Leading protest group the Hong Kong Federation of Students (HKFS) presented an open letter yesterday to the city's former leader Tung Chee-hwa requesting his help to arrange a meeting with Beijing officials. "We hope Tung can show political generosity... and help arrange a meeting between students and Chinese officials either in Hong Kong or in Beijing so that we can directly express the situation in the city," the federation said in the letter published yesterday. The Hong Kong government "did not have the ability to respond" to student demands, HKFS said, adding that they hoped to hear back from Tung by Sunday. Tung's office had no immediate comment.



Wearing World War II-era uniform of the Red Army troops, Russian soldiers take part in the military parade on the Red Square in Moscow yesterday. Russia marked the 73rd anniversary of the 1941 historical parade, when the Red Army soldiers marched to the front line from the Red Square, as Nazi German troops were just a few kilometers from Moscow.

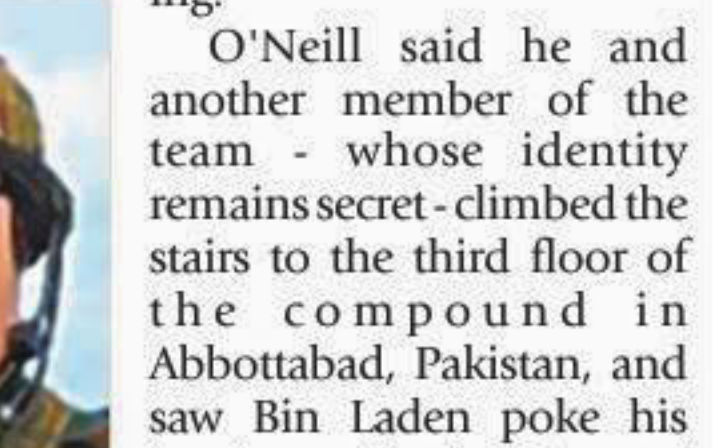
UKRAINE CRISIS

Tanks enter from Russia

Ukraine said yesterday that dozens of tanks and truckloads of soldiers had crossed from Russia into Kremlin-backed rebel territory, as five servicemen were killed in fighting that made a mockery of a supposed ceasefire. A column of 32 tanks, 16 howitzer cannons and 30 trucks carrying troops and equipment crossed the border into separatist-held Lugansk region Thursday, Ukrainian military spokesman Andriy Lysenko said, while another convoy including three mobile radar stations also entered the same area. There was no way to confirm the claims independently. Lysenko said five Ukrainian soldiers were killed and 16 injured in the past 24 hours in clashes between government forces and pro-Moscow rebels that underscored the emptiness of a two-month truce that both continue to insist they are respecting. Fifteen civilians were wounded by shrapnel in the separatist bastion of Donetsk, the mayor's office said, in a night of shelling in two neighbourhoods near the ruins of the airport, where government troops are holding out. While the September truce agreement has seen full-scale confrontations halt along most of the frontline, shelling has continued at flashpoints around the industrial east. Claims of fresh troop movements are reinforcing fears of a return to all-out fighting. The latest casualties came after Kiev moved to isolate the Kremlin-backed separatist regions, firming up the split of the ex-Soviet republic in a crisis that has sent East-West relations to their lowest ebb since the Cold War.

US Navy Seal row over who shot Bin Laden

A public row has arisen over which US commando fired the shot that killed Osama Bin Laden, more than three years after the Al-Qaeda leader's death. Ex-Navy Seal Robert O'Neill, 38, has told the Washington Post in an interview that he fired the fatal shot. This contradicts the account of Matt Bissonnette, another former Seal involved in the raid, in a 2012 book. The Al-Qaeda leader was killed in a 2011 Navy Seal raid on his compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan. Navy Seals usually abide by a code of silence that forbids them from publicly taking credit for their actions. O'Neill, who retired in 2012, had previously told his story anonymously to Esquire magazine. He was scheduled to reveal his identity in a television interview later this month, but



Robert O'Neill

Bomb rocks cash point in Nigeria

Several dead; Boko Haram blamed. A bomb concealed in a black plastic bag killed several people at a cash point in north Nigeria's Bauchi state yesterday near the scene of a recent bus station attack blamed on Boko Haram, witnesses said. Multiple residents of the targeted town of Azare told AFP that the bomber approached people who had queued up outside a First Bank branch at roughly 10:30 am (0930 GMT). "A man came on foot to this ATM where a large crowd was taking turns to withdraw money," said Lamara Ibrahim, who was at the scene. "It was while they were talking to him that the bomb exploded," said Ibrahim.

Modi adopts Jayapur village in Varanasi

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday charmed the residents of Jayapur, a village he has adopted under the Sansad Adarsh gram Yojana scheme for MPs. While making connecting with the cheering crowd, Modi said that he had come there with a request to adopt him. "It's a privilege to be associated with Jayapur village. I am not adopting Jayapur but I request you to adopt your MP," said Modi who flew to Jayapur after stopping in Varanasi, his parliamentary constituency, where he urged residents to think of him as their "sevak". "We have introduced Sansad Adarsh gram Yojana scheme for MPs, even I had to take responsibility as part of this. Jayapur took special place in my heart long time ago. An MP does not adopt a village. A village adopts an MP," the Prime Minister further added. The Prime Minister also explained why he chose Jayapur, a village about 25 kilometres from the ancient temple town of Varanasi. "I selected this village for a very small reason. I want to share it with you. Jayapur was the first village that I had heard of in Varanasi, that too when tragedy struck the village. Therefore I have adopted it." While talking about the collective responsibility to change and develop villages, Modi said one need not be dependent on governments for everything. "People should not rely on schemes alone for the development of villages, they should also take initiatives: I want to create a mentality to work for development of people who have helped us move forward," the Prime Minister said while proposing the idea of celebrating birth day of a village, an occasion which will go a long way in "ending" the caste system.